

m a g a z i n e o f
HORROR

The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 3

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(Cover by Virgil Finlay)

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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Lilies

by Robert A. W. Lowndes

(author of *Clarissa, The Abyss*)

This story was written in 1940, but the editors of what constituted the American market then were unanimous in agreeing that certain elements were just too much. It was something of a surprise to find that the Canadian market, which I thought was more prudish still, did not think so. My thanks to DONALD A. WOLLHEIM for suggesting that there was no reason now why it couldn't be revived for a first U. S. publication. I've taken the opportunity to revise and clarify certain elements, on the basis of studies undertaken since 1942, when the original version appeared in *UNCANNY TALES*.

EVEN TODAY, there is much that cannot be told. You will see from internal evidence that it happened in the U.S.A., some time between the Great War and Pearl Harbor; and from the descriptions of places you will be able to eliminate various parts of the country. That is all.

I had just emerged from a hospital early that week, having been there under observation for possible effects of concussion when I tried to occupy the same space as a taxicab, which had slowed down but not entirely stopped as the traffic light changed — something I'd failed to notice at the

moment. The doctors found no evidence of concussion, but I was experiencing some rather odd effects. There seemed to be an urge — at times, almost a call — to go somewhere. I could not be sure where. All I felt was that I had to leave New York City and go . . . It was annoying, and just upsetting enough to keep me from getting back to work — very often a writer needs no greater excuse.

That was the way it was that summer evening when I was sitting in my little apartment on the East Side, not far from Gramercy Park, sipping vermouth and soda and listening to a Beethoven piano concerto on my table phonograph. My fingers twitched as they always do when I listen to piano music.

The buzzer rang and a man's voice came through the speaker — a voice that I did not recognize — identifying himself as Harley Dane and saying that he would like to talk to me about an article. I had written about witchcraft. He had his secretary with him, he said, a charming young lady, and he promised that I would not be bored. I pressed the buzzer and invited them up.

I had received a number of letters, some phone calls and visits, before my mishap, in response to that article. For a moment, as I waited for the

sound of footsteps climbing the three flights of stairs, I wondered if Dane would be another crank — fascinating but hard to get rid of. Then a knock came at the door, and I opened it to see a tall, striking-looking gentleman in his forties, I'd say, and a lithe, graceful-looking girl with long dark hair. Dane introduced her as Jeanne Mariani and hearing her voice I knew at once that I would not be bored.

The record side came to a close as I seated my guests, and I moved to turn off the player. Dane demurred. "Please do not let us interrupt the music, Mr. Warren," he said. "Both Jeanne and I love Beethoven and Artur Schnabel." So I put the needle back to the beginning of the second movement, and fixed drinks for them. A phony music lover might urge me to continue what I was playing, but it took more than a phony to distinguish between Gieseking and Schnabel playing Beethoven's fourth piano concerto, coming in about halfway through the second movement.

DANE GOT DOWN to business after the music was finished by taking a magazine out of his pocket. "I was particularly interested in your final paragraph, Mr. Warren." He opened the magazine and read aloud: "*Were there any real*

witches in Salem? Perhaps some of the old women who were brought into court thought they were witches, or were convinced that they must be — under pressure. But I do not think so. There may have been a genuine witch or more in that area, but the investigators' presuppositions and methods could not possibly have uncovered any real witch who did not want to be discovered.

"I found that very interesting because it doesn't fit."

"Doesn't fit what?"

"The rest of the article is reasonably well done. You did a fair amount of research, though not in any real depth. Any number of competent writers could have written this article, except for the final paragraph. It struck me that there was something more than reading behind it — some knowledge based on experience."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it is entirely correct. . . . Have you ever known a witch?"

I shook my head. "I'm afraid I've misled you then, quite unintentionally. It — it was just a feeling I had after reading the accounts of the Salem Witchcraft. Afterwards, I felt that perhaps I should have rewritten it, but somehow that feeling persisted . . . I felt that this was the right ending, even if it didn't proceed logically out of the article itself. . . . The

editor told me that it didn't, but he said it was such a strong windup that he wouldn't think of cutting it."

"A good editor," Jeanne put in. "He knows when to throw away the rule book."

Harley Dane looked at me for a moment; then he said softly, "Are you sure you've never seen me before?"

"I — I don't think so. Unless . . ."

"Unless . . .?"

I took a swift gulp, then refilled my glass. "This may sound strange to you, sir, but . . . well, I had a serious accident about seven years ago. For a long time, I didn't know who I was. And there's still a gap — a pretty big gap." I lifted my hands and stared at my fingers. "I remember high school in the country to a point. It breaks off somewhere during a winter . . . and then I'm coming out of a hospital here in the city with just enough money to keep me while I look for work.

"I read a lot. I found that I can write. I know how to type, but my fingers don't co-ordinate right. I had to learn to type with two or three fingers of each hand and hardly ever using both hands at once. I find I know a lot of things that I don't remember ever studying. I find a lot of music familiar that I don't remember having heard before I bought

the records or heard a broadcast."

"What kind of music?"

"Some opera, but mostly piano music."

Harley Dane nodded. "Nicholas Warren is not too common a name, but you never liked to be called 'Nicholas', or 'Nick'. You didn't like your middle name, Jefferson, either; you called yourself 'Jay', after the initial. How do you feel about being called 'Jay'?"

"I — I — why, that's queer. It sounds right."

He took his wallet out of his jacket pocket and extracted a photograph. "This may be a shock to you — or it may not. As brutal as it sounds, I hope that it is a shock to you. I want you to look at this photograph very carefully. Don't say anything until or unless you feel something coming through — then say what comes to you."

HE HELD THE picture out to me and my fingers were trembling as I took it. Jeanne reached out and touched me. For a moment our eyes met and I felt something coming from her — something that flowed, a healing flow.

"Jeanne has a talent," Dane said. "She can help very much if you will let her."

I gulped and nodded, then looked at the photograph. It showed a young fellow, in his early twenties I'd say, and a

girl. A blonde girl, quite stunning to look at. There was an expression on her face, something behind the apparent beauty . . . and I felt a turmoil within me. It seemed as if a sudden storm had broken here in this room; winds were howling and centering on the chair where I was sitting. Only . . . the storm was inside me. I heard a voice in the roar, a voice that cried "*Caroline!*"

The next thing I remember, I was lying on the couch and Jeanne was bathing my forehead, her face very close to me. An instant later, things came into focus and I saw Harley Dane standing beside her. I started to get up.

"I — I have to go . . ." I began.

"Where?" Harley asked.

"I — I don't know." I sank back on the couch and Jeanne placed her hands on my temples. There was peace and warmth, and the storm was subsiding now. I told them about the feeling that had been coming to me since my recent entanglement with a taxi.

"The memories are beginning to come back, Jay," Dane said. "That is why she is starting to come through to you."

"Caroline?"

He nodded.

"Caroline? A witch?"

"A very dangerous witch, Jay. The accident that wiped out your memories also broke

her hold over you. She has been trying to find you ever since you disappeared, but her powers are limited — for the very reason that she is so dead-ly. I have been trying to stop her for over five years. Jeanne has only been with me for about a year and Caroline does not know that Jeanne exists.”

“How do you feel about Caroline?” Jeanne asked.

“Why . . . I don’t know. I think I love her, only . . .”

“You did once, Jay,” Dane said. “Until fear drove love out. But she has never forgotten you. She wants you. She wants to possess you again as completely as she did before. Are you willing to fight?”

I looked at Jeanne and said, “Yes.”

“Then you *will* be making a journey — with-me,” Dane said. “Have you any commitments that cannot be cancelled or postponed?”

“None right now.”

“Jeanne will be going on ahead of us in a day or two. I want you to receive healing from her in the meantime. . . . No magic, but you will receive some strength you need.”

He stood up. “You’ll have about a week to arrange for a trip at my expense. I do not know how long you will be away, but I do not think it will be more than a week if we win.”

“And . . . if we lose . . .”

“None of us will come back

if we lose. You will be alive — and perhaps even happy in the way that a puppet can be considered happy. I don’t mean that you’ll never see this apartment again — but if she wins, then Jay Warren will never come back. She always called you ‘Nickie’, and you always let her.”

2

TO EITHER SIDE of the road stretched fields and small, curving hills. Strange hills they were, set in a pattern which seemed to elude me constantly. I felt that I could recognize the pattern if I knew just one thing, and that one thing would explain why the hills themselves seemed to eerie.

There was a suggestion of brooding about the hills that made me think of fantastic illustrations I had seen in books by Charles Fort. I could picture, mentally, the skyscape set against a midnight sky, and the thought of that scene made me shudder, half-wondering why.

I was about to ask Harley some trivial question when a realization arose and dashed itself between my eyes. “Dane!” I gasped. “Shouldn’t there be a village here — Greylock?”

He turned to me with the wan imitation of a grin flickering on his face. “There was a village here once, Jay.”

“Once! It was here seven

years ago! A village can't disappear like that, leaving no traces. Why the very topography of this entire district has changed; and there's no sign of natural catastrophe . . ."

"Yet," interrupted Dane, "as you can see, the village is gone and these hills are here."

"Could it be a mirage?"

"It could be, theoretically. But it isn't." He eased the car to a stop. "Let's walk around a bit," he said. "I can see that you think that your eyes are betraying you. Very well; you shall have proof."

We slid out of the coupe on to the asphalt, hot and sticky beneath our feet. No cars were coming in either direction; we strode across the black spread of the road, toward the lush green of the field. And, almost at once, I felt an odd tingling, an impression of moist warmth; it was as if something had fallen upon me, completely enveloping me from head to foot. Or, as if I had suddenly plunged over my height into an unknown substance, less tangible than water, denser than air. It penetrated, sifted, through my clothing and lay directly against my flesh. I shuddered in revulsion, stood still, hesitating. Then the sensation had gone.

"Did you feel it?" asked Harley.

"Yes. What was it?"

He shook his head. "I can't tell you now. For a time, after

— it — happened, I used to feel just what you are feeling now. It strikes you as soon as you step off the road; you feel it for an instant, then it goes away. And, after you've come into the fields often enough, you don't feel it any more."

I looked up, gazed at the arches of azure over the field. There was nothing amiss in the sky; the same summer sun beat down upon me, the same downy masses of cloud floated atop the wind-waves. I could see the specks of birds in the distance, and, far away, the crests of trees.

And now sensations of comfort began to steal upon me. Yet they were — different. It was not the ordinary soothing effect of sun-splashes on a verdant hill. Somewhere, deep beneath the caressing of it, lay the faintest trace of that initial revulsion, drowned, weaving vaguely on the ocean-floor of this new contentment; but it was there, nonetheless. Then wave upon wave of pleasure swept over me, buffeting me, until the little eddies of distaste and unease were gone; now there remained only this strange new bliss, an ecstasy of feeling turf beneath my feet, of breathing summer-laden air, of beholding strangely-curved, green hills.

IT WAS THEN that I noticed the flowers. There had

been none of them near the road, and I am sure that I had not noticed any from the car. But as Harley and I wandered farther and farther away from the asphalt, heading for the base of one of the eerie hills, they began to appear, little clusters of them, seemingly rearing themselves up from nowhere.

They were tall, having the general shape and appearance of easter-lilies, but no ordinary lilies were they. Their shape was curving and — exciting. I felt a ripple of delight lance through me when first I saw them, a semi-erotic tingle. It seemed to me that they were swaying, weaving back and forth, deliberately attracting my attention — though no breeze stirred the air at that moment.

Gasping with mingled astonishment and delight, I knelt beside a cluster of the flowers, thinking it not at all strange that I should do so. Gently I ran my fingertips along the stem of the nearest flower, cupped the bell of it in my hands. It was lush, fleshy, and — inviting. I pressed my face close to it, breathing deeply of the fragrance that now issued from it. And, as I did so, my senses reeled, consciousness slipping away from me.

It seemed, now, that twilight had settled about me, and a darkhaired girl, clothed in the

green of the flower's spears, stood swaying before me. The scent of the lily was in her hair and her hands were downy and soft as the stem and bell of the flower. No sound came from her lips, but in my brain trilled the lyrics of the perfume she bore, and her eyes were calling, calling me, promising delights such as no man ever knew before. I could not move; it was as if I had taken root and become myself a plant; only with my eyes could I speak the yearning that welled within me, and plead for her caress.

SOMETHING FELL upon my shoulder. I tried to push it aside but it was firm and unyielding. Then the thing was shaking and mauling me; as in a dream, I tried to resist, but my movements were fruitless. It took all the strength I possessed to raise my hand, let alone use it for defense. Again came the shaking, and, at last daylight leaped up before me. It was Dane.

His face, I saw now, bore a worried look. "Better be careful about those flowers, Jay. They're — they're sort of poisonous. Narcotic. I'll tell you about it later."

I wasn't quite back yet, but things were steady enough to make me want to know more. "How long was I . . ."

"Just a few seconds. As soon as I saw you shoving your face

into that bell, I rushed over and pulled you away. Those things are deadly."

Deadly? No, that couldn't be. A little strange, perhaps — but surely not dangerous.

"What are they?"

He frowned. "Later, Jay. They came with the hills and the turf."

He grasped my shoulder again, as if to impart something particular, then apparently thought better of it. "Let's go," he said. I nodded, and started to follow him back toward the road. But — this lily. I didn't want to leave it behind. How could I ever find her again, one out of so many? With a sudden impulse, I stooped and plucked the flower.

A cry shrilled in my brain as my fingers closed around the stem, broke the slender back of it; a cry half of pain, half of delight. Mechanically I put the flower in my buttonhole and went on, wiping my hands on a handkerchief. The liquid did not feel right for the sap of a flower; I looked closely at the handkerchief, and at my hands.

The substance was unfamiliar; but the general nature of it was recognizable. Even though I knew better, I could not help but crying out as I saw the fluid on my hands.

Blood!

But it wasn't blood; this was sily. I reached for my button-

hole and took out the lily. It had, I noticed, already started to droop and wither. But, as my moist hands touched it, it began to regain strength and freshness. In a moment, it was the fresh, radiant flower I had just plucked, and my palms were dry. A whiff of perfume struck my nostrils . . .

Harley turned around. "Throw it away," he said. Something about the tone of his voice, quiet though it was, made me obey without argument. I realized, almost unconsciously, that here was subtle menace and that Dane knew a great deal more than he had told me as yet. That he would explain everything in due time, I had no doubt. But now — I would have to follow his suggestions and wait.

But, even as we stepped off the verdant turf, on the black asphalt again I was thinking to myself that I must return soon, must return and know these flowers again, more intimately.

"YOU MUST NOT say anything to Caroline about this episode, Jay. So far as she knows, we came by the other route and did not see this section at all. I told her that I found you in New York and explained something about your accident. . . . Your memory is beginning to come back and you wanted to see her again. She's married to Julian Brent

now, but he is away at present."

"And what about Jeanne — Miss Mariani?"

"You'll see her, but you don't know her. She took a position as Caroline's secretary. Caroline asked me if I knew someone who might like to fill in for awhile, so I sent Jeanne out with references."

"Rather fortuitous — an opening just at this time," I said.

"Not so much as you might think, Jay. Caroline does a lot of social work. She has had quite a number of young girls who have been her private secretary for a few months. None have stayed very long. All of them, like Jeanne, have been without families or close connections." He smiled. "That is, Jeanne has been tailored to fit the requirements. I have been unable to find any trace of these other girls once they left The Willows, which has been in the Goodenow family for generations. . . . How well do you remember Caroline now?"

"I remember The Willows — and all the weeping willows around. I — remember being there often with Caroline, and some books in her father's library. They were about magic and occult things. Very old books and many of them in foreign languages."

"What about music?"

"I wanted to become a pianist. I was pretty good, and

Caroline was sure she could help me. It had something to do with some of those books. She could arrange for me to have a concert at Greylock . . ."

"Did she?"

"Yes. . . . I remember playing. It was wonderful . . . but it was all wrong. I couldn't play that well. I could feel that it wasn't me . . . and then . . ."

Dane nodded. "Don't stop, Jay. Let it come through. Don't strain. Just keep talking."

"Then someone in the audience laughed and shouted something. He must have been drunk. I don't know what it was, but I heard someone calling out something, and then everyone was laughing, and . . ."

"And . . .?"

"And I couldn't play any more. I couldn't even read the music in front of me. It was far too difficult. I wasn't up to a work like this. . . . I remember running out of the hall, and people laughing."

"That is exactly what happened, Jay. You were actually capable of performing a moderately simple recital very well. That was what was announced. But what you started to play, after the first two numbers, was Charles Ives' *Concord Sonata* — something very few pianists care to tackle, and where Caroline got the notion that it would impress Greylock . . . Yet, it fits in — it fits in very well."

"And — after that," I continued, "I remember walking along the road, with tears running down my cheeks. And suddenly there were bright lights sweeping around a curve

"That was when you were hit. It was just a glancing blow, apparently, and it knocked you off into a gully where you lay in the underbrush. The man who hit you wasn't sober and he wasn't sure he *had* hit you. He came back and looked, and couldn't find any trace of you.

"You must have come to and wandered off. You were picked up by a truck driver who took you into New York. You had a little money with you, but no identification. He let you off somewhere and you kept on wandering — until you collapsed and were taken to a hospital. All you could tell them was your name. There were no clues to where you came from."

WE WERE OVER the last of the strange hills now. Up to the right, on an incline that had always been there, rested the estate. I saw no change in it, save for power lines. The great house had been repainted, I knew, but artificial weather-beating had been added, so that the rugged appearance remained. Save for electrification and modern plumbing, I thought, old Nathaniel Good-

enow would not find too much difference here — except for the absence of horses and carriages perhaps. All the furniture added, Harley said, had been built on the old style, built to endure.

"Remember, you have never met Jeanne before," Harley said. "She is not a servant, though she does some things that a maid would do, but she's treated as one of the family. Don't notice anything strange — I mean, notice it, but don't let on that you do."

The sun was dipping behind the strange hills, and I shook my head trying to clear it. "Harley, how could this happen? Greylock is gone and the whole countryside is changed. It's coming back to me now. But how is it that there was no investigation . . . I mean for a village to disappear like this . . . ?"

"This is pretty much back country, Jay. Greylock was always isolated. But there was an investigation of sorts, and there's an official explanation. So far as the records go, Greylock and all its inhabitants were wiped out by a flood."

"A flood! That's ridiculous — why . . ."

"I can't explain now. If I say 'witchcraft', that won't make much sense to you yet — but you'll have to take my word for it at the present moment."

Another road, coming from a different direction, joined the one we were traveling. Harley nodded toward it. "Just in case there's any question, that is the way we came. You were mostly asleep from the time we left Danville, which you do remember going through; you woke up now and then for a moment or two and didn't notice anything unusual."

"Is it all right if I remember The Willows, what it's like inside, and things like that?"

"Fine." He pulled to a stop inside the driveway. "Well . . . we're here."

3

JEANNE MET US alone; she was supposed to have seen Harley before, of course, but he introduced me as if we were strangers. She said that Caroline would be down in a moment or two. We talked for awhile, then I noticed that Harley was staring across the room; I followed his gaze.

"Jeanne," he said, "where did those flowers come from?"

"Caroline picked them this morning. I don't know where she found them — I haven't seen any lilies around here. Lovely, aren't they?"

A glance passed between her and Harvey. He nodded and she arose. "Excuse me — I'll tell Caroline you're here."

I waited until she had left,

then turned to Dane. "What's up?"

"She suspects something. Caroline has never broken a promise to me before, and she promised me after Anne — her most recent secretary — left that she wouldn't bring any more of the lilies into the house.

"You know how they affected you? Well, they have an even more pronounced effect upon ordinary women. That is — there are two kinds of lilies, though they all look alike. Take a good close look at those."

I arose and went over to the large flower bowl. Harley was right. They looked the same as the others, but I could feel a difference. There was a sort of attractiveness about them, but it was an attractiveness that made me want to destroy them. And then . . . suddenly I felt sick and weak, because I knew why these flowers would affect a woman the way the others had affected me. I think something of what was in my mind showed through as I turned and faced Harley.

He nodded, and was about to speak when I saw a woman standing in the doorway. Caroline!

For a long moment time stood still. Caroline! She had not changed, save to become more breath-takingly alluring, more alluring, more lovely — no! Not lovely. Something choked inside me as I realized that, choked

and began to cry like a lost child.

The beauty of her cut across my senses like a scimitar, yet, even if Harley hadn't told me about it, I would have sensed the aura, and begun to remember what I had found before. It enfolded her as a nimbus. It allured, even as fangs appeared to dart in and out of her.

Caroline had power. Power, I remembered, to turn detestation, or even hatred, into helpless adoration. Power which seemed visibly to reach out and surround me. For an instant I stood stock still, striving to beat off the influence; then, the woman before me began to change. The evil halo flicked out; the undertones softened and became gentle, and Caroline was now the lovely, breath-taking girl I had worshipped. What had happened to separate us?

"Nickie!" she whispered happily. "Nickie!"

Our hands clasped and she brushed her lips against mine. "Do you still love me, Nickie?" she asked.

A wave of resentment against Julian swept over me; had her husband been present I would have killed him on the spot. "I'll always love you, Caroline," I breathed.

She cupped my face in her hands, looked into my eyes, smiling. "Dear Nickie," she

sighed. Then her arms slipped away and she moved over toward the flower-bowl. "Have you seen my lilies?"

"Yes," I replied. "They are very strange flowers, Caroline. I do not think I have ever seen anything like them. What are they? Where did they come from?"

Her face was shining as with rapture. "I will tell you a story later darling. It is a very strange and wonderful tale, and I'm afraid you won't believe me. but it is true."

Her hands caressed the flowers. "There are several varieties of these lilies. You will like the other kind better, I think." She paused suddenly as if listening. "Excuse me, Nickie. I have to go into town for a little while. *Non ti scordar de mi.*" She turned to go.

"Do you want me to come along?" Jeanne asked.

"No, dear. You can help entertain our guest."

Non ti scordar de mi! Do not forget me! Where had I heard that before? She said it the way a woman says something with a very private meaning to just one person. And once she left the room, it seemed as if a spell had been lifted and she was changing in my impressions . . . changing back to . . .

"Harlevi!" I cried. "Can she be mad?"

"Not in the way you're think-

ing. No delusions, Jay. Her power is very real."

My throat was suddenly dry. "Then . . . the supernatural . . . witchcraft . . ."

"There is no supernatural," said Jeanne. "There is only one universe, and everything is natural. Discoveries have been made and largely forgotten, but that does not make them less real. If civilization were destroyed, perhaps electricity might come to be thought of as supernatural again. Is it?"

"But . . . magic . . ." I protested.

Harley got up. "We need some fresh air," he said. "You can't make sense of it all at once, Jay — and I think we'd better call you 'Nick' now. . . . Unless I'm very much mistaken, Caroline will want to take you for a drive when she comes back and show you the hills, then tell you the story of what happened to Greylock."

4

Under the quiet spell of Caroline's voice, telling the story as we sat out on the porch, overlooking the small lake behind the house, the picture of Greylock came back to me, as I had known it in the past. A small village, remote, set among mountains and a few lakes, like the one on the Goodenow estate, all lying in a basin. Large, sturdy, well built houses, most

of which dated far back. Spreading lawns and gardens. Here and there a garage, and a heavy new car or truck; but many horses and wagons, particularly outside the center of the village.

There were a few stores, a hotel and restaurant, a bar or two, churches, a school — that was where they held the concert — and a hall which was a dancehall, village meeting place, etc.

It was a Saturday night in late summer, one of the last few weekends when the air was warm enough for open cars. Most of the population of Greylock was gathered for the Saturday night dancing, young and old alike — square dances interspersed with the latest modern steps, as well as some older-fashioned steps, music by a pickup orchestra of local instrumentalists who spelled each other so that no one worked all night. A small colony of cars and wagons spread about the hall itself, near the bars and restaurant, while others found more secluded spots near the modest stream they called the river.

The night was calm, peaceful. In the sky, a few clouds drifted lazily across the disc of a full moon, stirred now and then by a breath of air. Grass, trees, and flowers gave off perfume; mossbanks near the water were warm and springy. From the

dance hall, couples would emerge to stroll down the fields out of sight. No slightest indication of disaster was afoot.

Shortly after midnight, a faint glow was discerned on the horizon. It seemed as if, many miles distant, a huge fire were flickering, although no bursts of smoke could be seen. For a time, many of the assembled watched it, fascinated, and members of the volunteer fire department gathered, expecting a summons to duty. But their chief shook his head. This was no business for men of Greylock unless an emergency call came through, which he thought to be unlikely. There were attendants on duty at the fire station; if men were needed, the alarm would boom out. The men went back to their partners and the dancing and love-making continued.

The night grew darker, strangely more dark than was usual for this time of year. In the sky, stars shone more brightly and the moon was gone. No clouds were visible. And on the distant horizon, the glow had died away.

But now, something else was apparent, something which made the music die away as all gathered to watch, half-fearfully. There was a radiance in the heavens far above them, a phenomenon for which there was no precedent.

It looked like threads of silver darting about the sky, or, as some one put it, as if people were drawing fine wires of mercury across the firmament.

While they watched, the bright threads became more numerous, weave themselves into fantastic patterns. The townspeople were somewhat alarmed, yet no one felt any distinct fear. It had a sort of hypnotic quality about it; they felt impelled to leave whatever they were doing and gather together in one great mass, where all could see the show.

LITTLE BY LITTLE, the couples who had strayed away from the revelry returned; the few old folks who had retired, or who had been sitting at home, came down to the center of town. Children were aroused from their beds, dressed and brought, unprotesting along. The entire population of Greylock was gathered in the center of town, craning their necks upward, little aware of each other, waiting. Waiting for they knew not what. Yet, unalarmed.

And the silver threads continued to weave about the sky, now forming a curious script, shading into definite symbols unlike any with which these people were familiar. Some looked about for old Dr. Bailey, feeling sure that he could explain, but he was in a neighboring town, attending a ma-

ternity case. One of the younger men, who had studied abroad for some years, noted that the script bore a faint resemblance to Arabic symbols, but he could recognize none of them.

Then, as strangely as the glow on the horizon had vanished, the silver threads died away. The townspeople looked at one another blankly; they had not, as yet, had time to recover from the strange experience.

And a wind arose.

It was a wind, bearing a whisper upon its crest; it descended upon them, caressing them with its whispers before any could flee indoors. Each person, man, woman, and child, it touched lightly with its fingers.

And, as if an electric light had suddenly been snapped off, Greylock was no more. It was gone as completely as if it had never been more than someone's dream, to be forgotten upon awakening.

Gone were the houses, the bars, the restaurant, the hotel, the churches, the dance-hall, and the school. In their place were fields, stretching from the asphalt road that had wound through the town, on to the new, weirdly curving hills. And gone were the people of Greylock; on the newly-arisen hills were clusters of flowers, flowers suggestive of

easter-lilies, yet not easter-lilies.

It had happened.

Part of me was listening, believing against belief, and part of me was asking how it was that The Willows was spared, how it was that Caroline and Harley had not disappeared with the rest. Caroline told of the investigation, of various people coming to The Willows and asking about the flood. Who would believe the truth? She told them what they wanted to hear. Harley was away on one of his trips when it happened.

When she finished, she grasped my hand. "Nickie, I'm afraid. There is something terrible happening here. That was five years ago, but it was only a beginning. I need help. I need you."

WE RETIRED shortly after that, but I knew I couldn't sleep. I lay fully dressed on the bed, then gave it up at last and went downstairs. I was not surprised to find Harley out on the porch.

"I thought you'd be down," he said, as he arose. "Come with me. There's something I want you to see."

"What about Caroline?"

"She's occupied — and, besides, she doesn't greatly care what I tell you or show you. Her story tonight was true, by the way — so far as it goes.

"Witchcraft?"

"Something more than that, but it'll do for now."

He wouldn't say more as we went down to the lake and got into a rangeley — a small boat with a broad back like a row-boat, but narrower, like a canoe, light, and propelled by paddles. At first, I thought we were just out for exercise; then, as I followed Harley's directions and steered at the rear paddle, I saw that we were headed for the small island toward the farther end.

I felt I should know something about this island, and the feeling came more strongly when I made out a cabin near the shore. We beached the rangeley, and my heart started to pound as we walked up the path to the cabin. The moon was bright and I could see well enough inside as we stepped in . . .

And I was choking, tears running down my cheek, a voice gasping *Gran Dio, que dolce!* The voice stopped, and I knew it was my own. I made my way to the sofa in front of the fireplace, half-wondering why I knew my way about here so well.

"Harlev," I said weakly, "what did I say?"

"*Gran Dio, que dolce!* Great God, how sweet!"

"But — that's Italian, isn't it? I don't know Italian."

"Are you sure, Nick? Look around here. Remember. What

happened here? Think of a winter night . . .

I closed my eyes, still brimming with tears, and leaned back. The words came haltingly. A winter night. Caroline and I were skating on the lake. We were near the shore, when she cried out something . . ."

"What, Nick?"

"*Aital Help!*"

I turned and saw that the ice had broken; she'd fallen through. There wasn't too much danger . . . it was quite shallow here, but we were both soaked before I got her out. We came into the cabin and I made a fire and . . .

"That was when you first became lovers, wasn't it. How old were you then?"

"Seventeen . . . I wasn't finished with high school yet. . . . I was staying here for that weekend. You were away, though I think you came back for Christmas. I remember you on Christmas morning . . . but what was I doing here on Christmas?"

"The same year, Nick?"

"No — it was the next year. But — why, I was living here. Mr. Goodenow treated me as a member of the family — a cousin. . . . My parents . . . killed the winter before in an accident . . ."

"What is my full name, Nick?"

"Harley Dane — Goodenow."

"And yours?"

"Nicholas Jefferson Warren

...” I stared at him. “You said you were trying to stop her. She’s a witch. It’s in the family. You’re a witch. And I . . . am I . . .?”

HE SHOOK his head. “Not in your branch of the family, Nick Goodenow. You are our cousin. It isn’t hereditary, although talents which help the study of witchcraft can be inherited.” His hand grasped my shoulder as he stood beside the sofa. “There just a little more you have to remember now. Try.”

“I loved her. She loved me. But is was so strange. Everything seemed to go right. No one suspected us. We were never surprised in anything compromising. Now and then I wondered . . . and there was something about Caroline, about that night . . .”

“What, Nick?”

“It was so warm suddenly when we came toward the cabin. The ice began to get soft. It was almost comfortable in spite of our wet clothes, the warm air. But when we went back, after our clothes dried, it was clear and cold again and the ice was firm.”

“How did you feel?”

“I loved her — but I wondered. I wanted to learn to play the piano and she helped. She loved opera — that’s where the Italian came in. We talked to each other in phrases out of librettos; we didn’t really know

the language. Her favorite was *La Traviata*; mine was *Il Trovatore*.”

“*La Traviata* — The Wayward One, very appropriate, I’d say,” Harvey commented. “Just one more thing. What about your progress on the piano?”

“It — it wasn’t right. I played music too well for so little practice. My teacher thought I put in five or six hours a day, but I didn’t. Caroline said she could help me learn faster . . . she would stroke my brow and sing strange little songs. . . . Harley! Is Jeanne a witch?”

He shook his head. “No, but . . .” He struck his head with his fist. “I’ve been a fool, Nick! I’ve done just what she wanted me to do, and Jeanne is in danger. We’ve got to get back to the house.”

WE ENTERED the drawing room, and Harley clutched my arm. “Look!” he whispered.

For a moment, I could discern nothing in the darkness, then my eyes made out a form, over by the window by the great flower-bowl. It was Jeanne.

She sat there motionless, her body taut, then, as we approached, it relaxed, quivered. Lily bells surrounded her and her hands were moving slowly, running up and down the white stems of the flowers, and caressing the cups of them. A low moaning came from her throat, a sobbing of delight.

Jeannel For a moment I stood transfixed at the horror of it, then I was running across the floor. Jeannel! Something cautioned me against crying out, calling her name. With a swift movement I brushed the flowers away, lifted up her head so that the long, dark hair streamed back and fell upon her shoulders. Jeannel!

Her eyes were vacant, unseeing. The breath between her lips came in little gasps and her full bosom was heaving spasmodically. Her slim hands were clenching and unclenching; now they gripped me and clung, the finely manicured nails biting into me.

I lifted her out of the chair, pressing her to my chest. She remained motionless, she fell back. Quickly I picked her up and started back toward the stairs.

Jeannel! She lay limp and unmoving in my arms, her body still trembling with the unholy delight of the lilies. Not until we had reached the head of the stairs did she seem to recover. Her eyes opened, a puzzled look in them. "Nick," she murmured happily, as a child might murmur the name of a loved one upon awakening. Then, her head fell against my shoulder again, and she was asleep.

We placed her in the bed, drew the clothes over her, and opened the window so that she would get sufficient fresh air.

Then we tiptoed out, closing the door.

Once outside, I turned to Harley fiercely, but he motioned for silence until we had regained his room. He locked the door and turned to me. "It was the same way with the others, Nick," he said.

"Can't her husband do anything?" I demanded. "Is Julian under her spell, too?"

"Nick, Julian Brent hasn't been seen since the night it happened!"

5

FAR AWAY in the dark a voice was calling, calling. The sound of it rustled against my consciousness, stirred the tendrils of my memory. A half-plaintive whisper. The voice of a girl I had known . . . somewhere in the past. Out of the mists came the whisper, and something long buried stirred within me so that I arose to seek out the voice. Yet, it was not I who arose then; it was a boy, newly awakened.

And the voice I heard was the voice of a girl who made me feel glorious. So I arose, groping my way in the blackness, running my hand along the wall for a spot I suddenly knew was there; in a moment I had found it; I pressed gently and a section of the wall slid away revealing an emptiness. Yet, this way was not unknown to me,

and cautiously I found the first step with my foot, then the railing with my hands, and the section of wall slid back into place. But I was not afraid.

The steps were hard beneath my feet, and I knew they had been carved in the stone upon which this house had been built. Down, down, and down I proceeded until at last the stairway had come to an end, and, far ahead, I could see the faint flicker of a dim light. It was from this point that the voice came. Eagerly I hurried toward it, then bore sharply to the right, through an arched doorway, and found myself in a large subterranean room.

And there she awaited me, surrounded by strange, tall flowers that gave off a fragrance that made my senses reel. A young girl she was, young as myself, and the summer stars were in her eyes; the silk of Cathay was in her hair, and the red of pomegranates in her lips.

Caroline.

And now she was here, waiting for me in this strange, secret place. For a second, a shrill of alarm rippled through my brain, a suggestion that all was not as it seemed. But the fragrance of the flowers was in my nostrils and words were welling to my lips that must be spoken now. She was as the queen of an olden land, my Caroline, and I knelt.

Then she held out her hand,

and I rose and sat beside her. Her eyes searched my face for a time, half-eagerly, half sadly, and sorrow arose in me at the thought of her unhappiness. But now my queen was no longer imperious and her golden head was buried against my shoulder as her arms encircled my neck. So we remained long and she whispered of those who were cruel and tyrannical, so that I finally demanded my right to vengeance.

FOR A TIME she protested, then, at last, consented and we arose and went into another room where a man sat in a large chair. A heavy robe was spread over his limbs so that I could see nothing below his waist. His face, I could see, was dark and evil. And she told me of his wickedness and cruelty, told me how she had been imprisoned here many days at a time awaiting his pleasure. His head was bowed in sleep as she spoke; a mad fury stirred in me, and I made as if to awaken him, for I desired to take his life with my own hands. But she demurred, holding me back, for he was a powerful man, one who could easily overcome one younger. Then my eyes fell upon an object lying near the chair and I gasped in horror. She saw it, too, and her face blushed crimson with shame as her eyes brimmed hotly with tears. A whip.

I could contain my rage no longer, so I pushed her aside, and, seizing the whip, I brought it down with mad fury upon the sleeping man, slashing and slashing again in mindless hate. His eyes opened, caught me in the moment of raising the whip, preparing to slash his face . . .

His eyes!

There was no evil in them. They were the eyes of a man tormented beyond endurance, eyes that were glassy and dry because they could weep no more. There was neither pleading nor reproach in them; merely suffering and sadness. The lash fell from my hands; the room wavered before me. With a choking cry I wheeled about, faced this girl.

Then I knew! I knew Caroline!

With a swift movement, I grasped the whip again, but she was too quick for me; her hand fell upon my arm and from the curious ring on her finger, something darted forth and stung. I could not move. Helpless, I stood there as something stirred behind me and I felt myself grasped, lifted.

One thing only I saw before the darkness gathered me in: the form and face of the one who bore me. It was—myself!

THE SLOW drip-drip of water splashing against my face aroused me. I sat up suddenly, trying to remember — what? An

icy drop dashed itself on my neck, trickled down my back. Then I knew.

A gloomy place, this underground suite; light filtered in, somehow, enough light so that I could make out objects in this room.

I sat on a makeshift bunk in one corner; a battered table was in the center of this alcove, and, to one side, a doorway. I made my way toward it, expecting to find a barrier, but none was there. I passed through easily and stood in the large chamber where last I'd seen Caroline.

It was richly furnished; thick, heavy rugs were strewn on the floor; tapestries lined the walls, the sweep of them broken only by bookcases, crammed with dusty volumes. Weirdly carved chairs and tables decorated the chamber, while, in the center rested the massive chair in which the man I had flogged still sat.

As I neared him, he was murmuring "Caroline, Caroline," in deep heavy tones.

He saw me and fell silent, bowing his head. What could I say to him? A long silence then his head came up again, his eyes filled with a look of bewilderment.

"Why do you wait?" he rumbled. "Is it not time!" Then, as I made no answer: "Or is it to be something new today?"

His eyes searched me, fell upon my right hand; then he

glanced over at the table where the whip had lain. It was there, waiting.

My voice returned to me. "Who are you?"

"You speak?" he gasped.

"Of course," I held out my hands to him. "I am you friend," I said simply. "What I did to you last night, I did without knowing. Why should I wish to harm you? I have never seen you before."

"Come closer," he whispered. He drew a cushion from the chair, dropped it on the floor. "Sit here beside me."

"Yes," he said as I obeyed his request. "Yes. You are—the living one. You are Nicholas Goodenow."

"That is my name. But you—who are you? And why has Caroline put you here — what has that fiend done to you?"

He winced visibly. "No," he said. "No. You must not say that. She is not to blame — something has possessed her. I love her." He fell silent, breathing heavily.

"But," I protested, "this is fantastic — it can't be — it . . ."

"Wait! I will tell you."

He paused, trying to collect his thoughts.

"It seems so long since I have talked to anyone. She never speaks to me, now.

"I am Julian Brent. Yes, that is who I am. Sometimes, it is hard to remember. I am Julian

Brent of Greylock — of the town that was once.

"How long ago it was, I cannot be sure. Perhaps I have been here many years. But once, I was as other men. And I loved a beautiful, golden-haired girl named Caroline. Loved her even though I knew she cared little for me.

"One night I asked her to marry me, little thinking that she would accept my proposal. I hoped that, in time, she would come to care for me.

"Caroline was very kind for the first few months of our marriage. Then, strange things began to happen. I could not understand them. It seemed that I would sleep for days at a time; sometimes I would wonder if she were poisoning me, but I was too fogged to care much. And, when I did see her, her gentleness made me forget my suspicions. Can you understand?"

I nodded. "Yes. I loved her too, once."

"That is right. But, what you did not know was that she still desired you. She has some uncanny power . . ."

"What happened?"

"One night, there was a storm — lightning struck my room. I awoke and found myself alone. Caroline was gone: I was afraid for her. I arose and went downstairs, looking for her. Then, I thought I heard sounds beneath the front room. As I looked more

carefully, I saw that a section of the wall had slid aside.

"I went down a long flight of steps, thought of smugglers, dope rings, and the like in my mind. That would account for her keeping me drugged. And I came to a room—this room.

"CAROLINE WAS here — with a man it seemed at first. She was making love to him; I could hear what she was saying and it made me feel old and sick.

"She was telling him in detail how she hated and despised me, how she put some spell upon me to make me sleep while she came down here and gave herself to him."

"Did you see this—man!"

He shook his head. "It was not a man. It was a — thing — she had made with her arts. It looked like a man, moved like a man. But it could not speak. She was trying to complete the spell, to make it really alive. It was a sort of robot; it obeyed her every command, but could do nothing of its own intiating.

"Caroline—oh the vileness of it. She was abasing herself before this thing. pleading with it to speak, to tell her it loved her. She called it by name — your name.

"I think I went a little mad then. Had it been another man, I might have restrained myself, though I most certainly would have divorced her, but — this.

I rushed into the room, seized something — I forget what it was — and set upon the thing. It could not fight; it fell to the floor and lay still. She might have willed it to struggle with me, but I was too quick for her. I damaged it, so that she could do nothing with it at the time. Then I turned and faced her.

"She looked hideous then — I think I forgot that I loved her. She spoke some words — they sounded like a pagan chant. And I became as I am now."

He tore the robes from his limbs. "See!" he cried. "See what the woman I love did to me!"

I reeled back in horror. For, from the waist down, Julian Brent was not a man. Choking, I stretched forth a hand, unable to believe my eyes. But the touch of my fingers confirmed what I had seen.

Stonel

GREAT TEARS rolled down his cheeks. "Seeing you, another living person, has brought me back to myself. I can weep again."

"Does she . . . ?" I asked, looking at the whip.

"No. She never touches me. She makes the thing do it. I could endure pain at her hands —but not that foulness.

"Nicholas," he whispered, "Nicholas Goodenow. Tell me I am not mad. Tell me that it

is as I believe: Caroline is not herself. A demon has possessed her. She is not responsible."

I nodded. "It must be," I said with as much conviction as I could muster. "But why did she marry you?"

"For punishment. . . . You didn't know — I was the one who laughed at you that night at the concert. I broke you up and you couldn't play any more. Then you disappeared. She never let on that she cared greatly about you until . . . Can you forgive me?"

I gripped his shoulder and could not help touching his rigid hip. Stone? It looked like stone and it was very hard to the touch, but now I realized that it wasn't quite that. There was a sort of petrification, as it were. He could no more move the lower part of his body than if he were really stone; but whatever had happened, this wasn't the fairy tale magic of the *Arabian Nights*, even if Caroline's vengeance had come right out of it.

"We must save her, you and I," Julian was saying. "Even if it means my losing her forever, it is better than letting her remain like this. If you had seen her groveling before that thing! She likes to pretend that it is her master and she is its slave—that she would be submissive to you that way if you came back to her — but that is just a pose." He looked at me. "If you come

back to her as she is now, Nick, you will become a robot — like that thing."

"Can you see her from where you sit?"

"I cannot help seeing her. Seeing her is part of my punishment; she knows I suffer more from that than from the whip."

"Where does she keep this—thing?"

"There is a small stud just above the third shelf of the bookcase, to one side. Press it and the case will swing out. It is in a cubby there."

I leaped to my feet, ran over to the bookcase. The stud was not visible, but at length my finger found it. I pressed and stepped to one side as the case dipped out.

Now I could see my image and the perfectness of the copy amazed me. It did not look like a mirror-copy, of course. Rather, it looked like a photograph of me. Not exactly flattering, and a bit disconcerting in spots, but I knew myself nonetheless. The flesh was normal.

"Don't worry," called Julian. "It cannot move until she has chanted the spell. She makes a counterspell when she wants to put it away. I think that is because it responds to mental control and she fears I might be able to command it in her absence were she not to put it out of control."

A PLAN was forming in my mind, a mad plan. "Julian." I said. "If there were some way of killing this thing, I could take its place when Caroline comes again."

He was silent. "How can you kill it?" he asked at length. "How can you kill something that never lived?"

I grasped the creature, dragged it out and laid it on the floor. There must be some way. Imprison it? No, it might have superhuman strength once it were called. Destroy it? How, I looked back into the aperture, thoughts of damaging the creature's head in mind. Then the golem was forgotten as I saw something else: an archway to the left of the little closet, leading to points unknown.

"Nick," whispered Brent. "Put it back; there's someone coming."

I picked up the creature, propped it back against the wall and closed the door. Quietly I moved toward the passageway. There were footsteps far above; someone had just left the drawing room of the manor, then.

"Caroline!" I muttered. If I could waylay her — I crouched against the wallside, waiting. There was just light enough to discern a person approaching and, if I moved quickly, to attack before she saw me. I must guard against the ring on her finger, and press my hand over her mouth so she couldn't call

upon my image. She might have other means of offense, but that was a chance that had to be taken.

The footsteps approached cautiously. An instant later, a figure appeared in the gloom. Now!

I flung myself forward, grasping the woman around the waist clutching her right wrist in such a manner that she could not use the ring on her third finger, crushed my hand against her mouth, and lifted her off the ground. She struggled in my grasp, trying to bite the hand against her lips, clawing at my neck, her pointed shoes beating a tattoo against my ankles. Half carrying, half dragging her, I re-entered the room.

Julian looked surprised. "Nick," he said, "that's not ..."

I looked at the woman, now that we were in the light. And released her, astonished.

"Jeanne!" I cried, catching her before she could tumble to the floor. "Jeanne, forgive me! I thought it was Caroline!"

Her hair was badly disarranged, and lipstick was rather badly smeared over her mouth, but she looked very sweet and dear to me at that moment.

"Nick!" she gasped. "Are you all right?"

"Quite. I should ask you. Did I hurt you?"

"You weren't exactly gentle" she replied ruefully. "And there's a run in my stocking."

Julian laughed, for the first time in our acquaintance. "There'll be worse than that before this is over, my dear."

"Jeanne, where is Harley?"

Before she could answer, someone stepped into the room. "Right here, Nick," came his voice. "And we have to move quickly. Caroline went out on the hills a few moments ago, but she's likely to return soon. And, when she does, my guess is that she'll make for these parts without delay. We weren't as careful about closing doors behind us as we might have been."

Before I could answer, Jeanne's arms were around me and her face was buried against my chest as her body choked convulsively. She'd just noticed Julian.

"HARLEY, I exclaimed, "I just found a passage leading down to nowhere at all. Think we'd better take a look?"

He nodded. "Let's go."

"Jeanne," I whispered, "wait for us upstairs. You can head Caroline off."

I was sorry a second later that I'd said that. Because it was a different Jeanne who looked up. "Trying to get rid of me, Mr. Goodenow?" she asked with deadly sweetness. "You're wasting your time; where you go, I go, too." I could see by the look on her face that this was no time either for apology or argument. So I answered

her by beckoning them both to follow me as I went over and pressed that stud again.

We shoved the golem to one side, swung the door shut behind us. Harley took out a pair of flashlights, handed one to me. "And Jeanne has a very wicked little automatic tucked in her belt; you'd have gotten a load of it there in the passage if you hadn't taken her off guard."

"I was trying to shut that damned door upstairs, didn't notice that she wasn't waiting."

More of those weird steps carved in stone. Smooth walls on either side of the tunnel, walls without a break or projection of any kind. Walls that curved upward, arched, like a glass tube. The stairs wound and twisted; for nearly twenty minutes we descended.

Until we came to a blank wall.

We played the flashlight over every inch of that blankness; we tapped and pressed, but there was no slightest indication of a doorway. Jeanne glared at it. "Hey, you," she said. "You, Sesame! Open up!"

"No dice," said Harley.

"Plenty of dice," replied Jeanne. "Look!"

Only it wasn't opening. It was extending; visibly. The passage was lengthening out before us, the floor continuing on a smooth, even level. We started to follow, and the weird extension continued at an even pace. Just

to test it out, we stopped. It stopped.

"Shouldn't have done that," I muttered.

But the moment we started on, it began again.

"This," mused Jeanne, "would be fun under different circumstances."

My thoughts began to tick, then.

"Harley, you've been this way before, haven't you?"

"No, Nick. I've known it was here. All the Goodenows in this branch of the family have known. But only one has come this way too soon, before."

"You mean Caroline."

"Caroline — and myself, and you. Ordinarily, you'd have never come, but now we have to take a chance."

Jeanne turned to him. "Then one of the *places* in various parts of the world is right here, under The Willows."

Harley nodded. "According to family history, Jedadiah Goodenow came here, seeking out the *place*, in the 17th century. He cleared the land and lived in peace with the Indians. The Willows wasn't built until early in the 19th century, but Goodenows were already here when other settlers came in. . . . Somehow, Caroline found the *place* too soon."

"You mean — her power has something to do with what we're seeing down here?"

"And what we're going to see.

Yes, it has everything to do with it. The talent varies from person to person in our family, Nick. Caroline actually has a very little of it; I have a great deal more. She obtained power before she really knew the elements of witchcraft, and she has little idea of how much power she really has. Or rather, what uses she could really put it to. That's why, although I couldn't stop her alone, it was simple for me to keep her from using ordinary witchcraft to locate you when you disappeared. I knew where you were from the day I found out you'd gone."

THE TUNNEL before us stopped its extension. As we played our flashlights on it, a hole appeared in the center of the tubelike end, began to grow, until it was a great opening, large enough for us to go through.

"Well," said Jeanne, "why are we waiting?"

There was no answer to that. We stepped forward into another cavern, entirely unfurnished.

I think I must have been looking at it for some moments before I saw it, and I'm not sure that I saw what the others saw. A gravish-white mass, its form uncertain since we could see so little of it. It made me think of a rock, and a mushroom, and an overgrown amoeba rolled into one. Only it didn't

move. It was there, and it was huge; that was all.

But not all, if you follow me. I heard Jeanne say softly, "The Lord of the Manor."

Then, suddenly, there was a face in the mass before it, as if a venerable old man's face had been carved in it. And it seemed that a voice was saying, "Why you come, humans?"

Harley started to say something, but the voice interrupted. "Wait. Talk too slow. Think answer. Open mind."

That was how the Being's conversation sounded to me. Only, after awhile, I realized I wasn't hearing anything at all. The eyes in the face turned to Harley and there was silence; yet I felt that communication was flowing between them. It turned to Jeanne, and the same thing happened. At length it turned to me.

I felt the eyes boring into me, and felt questions rising up inside me.

"Not supernatural," came the voice. "Not god. Child of Creator like humans. Have job. Humans have own job."

I was asking if the Being granted wishes.

"Humans want, ask, receive. That is Law. Law universal. Law good. Humans free, be good, be bad, be foolish."

I was curious about how this power worked. The answer came, "No words in human head. Beyond words. Human can learn

Law. Not understand much. Foolish."

I wondered about that. "Foolish human not ask price. Can get much power quick. Not earned. Must pay price. Nothing free. All must pay. You buy thing not ask price? Sign contract not read? If earn, you have price. Pay when buy."

Again a silence as the eyes closed. Then I felt them boring into me. "Yes. Harley ask price. Jeanne ask price of desire."

And it seemed to go and on, for my own desires came up and I seemed to see a panorama before me. There are no words in my vocabulary to describe it. I saw that it would be impossible to restore Greylock; to restore Caroline. Only she could pay her own debt, and in time she would, as would everyone.

"Hell not forever. Delusion. Human seek light, find light. Have help but must return to road. Not carried back. No magic."

I reached out and grasped Jeanne's hand; and the voice seemed to say, "You know price. Pay as earn."

Harley said, "We must go now." I turned away, after thinking my gratitude toward the Being.

6

"CAN YOU restore Julian?"
I asked as we ascended the stairs.

He nodded. "I can. But it would be better to make Caroline do it."

We were now at the head of the stairway. "Caroline has not returned yet," said Harley. "So there's time."

He turned to Jeanne. "Go upstairs and take pencil and paper, make this sign," and here he whispered in her ear, "and place a slip of paper bearing the sign under the big flower-bowl or vase bearing lilies. Be sure that the paper cannot be seen; it makes no difference how large or small the sign is made."

She nodded and left the subterranean chamber. Harley looked after her. "She will be safe, now," he remarked. "That sign will act as a counter-agent against the lilies; they will not be able to harm her — or anyone else for that matter."

Julian was asleep. "No need to awaken him. Now we'll get that golem out of the way."

We dragged it out, took it into the room where I had found myself some hours before. "No time to destroy it," explained Harley. "But I will keep it from being summoned. You, Nick, will take its place."

"I was planning to do just that when we heard you and Jeanne coming." Then a thought struck me. "But why? What good could that do? She won't be interested in a substitute now, will she?"

Harley nodded. "She thought

you'd succumb to her completely, Nick — but you didn't. She's been infatuated with an imaginary Nick Goodenow for a long time, and the reality—the difference—is a shock. She's frightened and frustrated. Yes . . . she'll go back to her golem while she tries to reshape you to her desires.

"There's a good chance you can deceive her. I can see a little ahead now, just a little. She has completed the spells which will give the golem speech. Stay perfectly still while she's doing that then come to life when she asks you to speak."

"All these spells and chants," said Jeanne. "It's silly. If she got the kind of power from that Being that I think she did, she doesn't need the trappings of magic at all."

"And it all seems so incomplete," I added. "What does it mean?"

Harley sighed and rubbed his brow. "Caroline found the Lord of the Manor. I don't know how—the practice in our branch of the family has been to take members to It when they've shown some indication of being ready. That includes knowledge and a developed sense of responsibility. Anyway . . . she found It on her own, and took It for some sort of god which could grant favors. The Being gave her what she asked for. Did It tell you that there was a price to pay for all knowl-

edge or power you haven't earned?"

"Yes."

"It told Caroline, but she wasn't concerned about that. Reminds me of the legends of a deal with the Devil. The bargainer does not bother to inquire just what the loss of his soul will mean, or *when* he becomes the Devil's property. The Devil is the Father of Lies, as legend goes, so does not volunteer information not asked — or deliberately deceives the poor fool. . . . Well, we're not dealing with some imaginary creature supposed to be equal to God, only Evil. But the fact is that you *can* obtain knowledge or power — through what we call 'occult' means — that you haven't earned. And you do not have to know the price beforehand — but ignorance won't spare you if you're foolish enough to take it without asking."

"Then what has happened to Caroline is part of the price?"

He smiled sadly. "Isn't it obvious? She imagined, just as many people have imagined, that this pavement — whatever it was — was something that would come some time in the future. Something which she could get out of at the last moment, somehow. We've all been churchgoers, and she'd heard the nonsense about deathbed conversions which are supposed to jump you smack into heaven

without your reaping anything of what you've sown. A well trained witch knows better — and so does a well trained churchman."

"Then," I said slowly, "you mean that if you get something you haven't earned — something for which you'd have to work hard and a long time for — you pay a much higher price."

"And you start paying *at once*. An ignorant person often pays for a long time before he realizes what has happened." He grasped my shoulder. "You've been paying, too, Nick. You accepted something you hadn't earned—you knew you shouldn't be able to play so well, so easily. . . . But your motives were a little higher — you really loved something outside your own desires — so it wasn't as bad as it might have been."

"And Caroline is fixed in the emotional state of a sixteen-year-old. No older. She'll never be able to get any mature satisfaction from the power — but she'll keep on trying, and frustrating herself more and more." There was pity in Jeanne's voice.

"Which is why she's so dangerous," Harley said. "It's because she's an adolescent — shifting between childishness and the desire to be grown up — that all these things seem like a story that a child makes up after reading books of fairy tales. There's love — a very im-

mature notion of love — and intrigue, vengeance, and a touch of tragedy. She became in her own mind the princess who would attain all her desires after suffering many things. She was sure that she would find a way to bring you back here eventually — and then, everything would come out all right.”

“And that business with her private secretaries?”

“Probably an accident the first time. Then . . . Well, I suppose that she found it amusing. With Jeanne — I think she suspected that Jeanne and I were up to something.” Suddenly he paused, listening intently. “Get into your place,” he whispered. “She’s coming.”

IT SEEMED hours, though it could only have been a moment or so of waiting in the darkness before the bookcase swung open to reveal Caroline standing before me. She was robed in purest white, her golden hair braided, devoid of makeup. No ornaments graced the simplicity of her vestments; on the index and little fingers of her left hand were rings, one of which bore a serpent.

With downcast eyes, she knelt before me, arms crossed over her breast. Then, in a hushed voice, scarcely more than a whisper, she began a slow, renititious chanting. Slowly her voice rose; her arms un-

crossed, raised themselves in supplication. The chanting ceased and she bowed down, clasping my ankles and touched her lips to the ground before my feet.

I must not move, must not show the slightest indication of life or consciousness.

Now she rose, and, fingering the first ring, chanted again. No more was she the supplicant; she faced me with the dignity of an honored priestess. Then, flinging her arms around my neck, she kissed me full on the mouth. And, standing back, my arms upraised, she shouted a single word.

It was the final command. Now, must I awake, and have power of speech.

Slowly, I opened my eyes, met hers, shining with triumph.

As if another signal had been given, she stepped back and began to dance, first swaying her body in the manner of nautch dancers, then pirouetting, posturing, and beckoning. Now her hands caught the white vestments, tore and rent them, casting them from her and trampling them underfoot. And I saw that, beneath the pure white of the gown, she wore barbaric metal trappings and strings of jewels.

My blood was racing, my senses aflame with her dance, so that, when at length she sank in a panting heap before

me, I strode forward, unthinkingly, and lifting her in my arms, carried her, quivering with anticipation, to the couch set in full view of Julian's chair.

"Beloved," whispered Caroline, "beloved, speak to me."

I set her down on the couch, remembering. "How can I speak of love," I said in hollow tones, "when my ears are filled with the sounds of one in anguish, and my eyes see naught but suffering?"

Caroline's eyes widened; she flung herself upon me, buried her head against my chest. "What does my lord desire that I do?"

"Restore this unhappy mortal who has done you no harm, whose only crime was that he loved you."

Her eyes, tender now, searched my face. "Does this mean so much to you, light of my life?"

"Even so," I answered. "For with this suffering before me, I cannot see you, or any other thing."

SHE ROSE, and went over to Julian. Placing the ring of the serpent against his forehead, she cried out in strange accents, and the seeming stone that comprised the lower half of him faded before my eyes. Slowly Julian stood up and faced her.

Her nostrils flared. "Go now," she said to him. "Go and never

let me see you again lest I repent of my kindness."

Suddenly she stiffened; her eyes fixed upon the doorway of the cell where the golem had placed me. Harley stood in the doorway facing her. I saw disbelief and terror conmingled on her face. Slowly he advanced toward her, holding something in his hand, the form of which I could not see. In desperate tones, she cried out, pointing both ringed fingers at him.

Harley smiled, and continued to approach. She shrank back, disbelief upon her face. Then, suddenly, there was a whirl of smoke before my eyes, and she was gone. And Jeanne was gone.

"What happened?" I gasped.

He struck his thigh with his fist. "Curse me!" he exclaimed. "It's my own fault; I would try to be dramatic, and hold off the climax. Now she's out of our hands."

"What will she do now?" asked Brent.

"Are you all right, Julian?" I interrupted.

He fingered a scar running down one cheek. "As much so as I'll ever be."

"We'd better be moving," broke in Harley, starting for the door. "Caroline's pieced things together by now; she'll be ready to strike back. And that means we have to find Jeanne in no time flat."

We tore up the stairs, burst into the drawing room, calling

Jeanne's name. No answer. Julian covered the second floor while Harley started the car and brought it around to the side of the house. No Jeanne.

In the distance, the accursed hills loomed ominously. "Apparently," Harley said, "she took Jeanne then made for her cove.

"It occurs to me." Julian added, "that we were looking at that cloud of smoke considerably longer than it seemed to us."

"Not only possible," replied Harley, slamming the door, "but almost certain." The car leaped forward like a hound, suddenly unleashed. Above us the stars burned with a brightness I did not like. My mind was numb from the long series of shocks to my credulity it

had received in the last few days. One thing, and one alone it seemed, stood out as a barrier of sanity in the mad pattern. Jeanne. And now she was gone, caught up in this vortex of hellishness.

The car stopped. "We go from here on foot."

Again I stepped across the margin of asphalt, again felt the tingling and inner revulsion. But this time, that detestation remained undisturbed.

"Look!" exclaimed Brent.

Before us stretched the lily clusters, but beyond, in a circle of the flowers, I could make out two figures, one standing, one lying upon the ground.

Jeanne! I leaped forward, darting ahead of the others. "Nick!" shouted Harley. but I paid him no heed. Madly I ran

toward the cleared spot, avoiding lily-clusters in my way. At length I was at the rim of it.

"Nick! For God's sake *don't enter that circle!*"

The warning came too late. Before I could halt my mad rush, I had plunged through what felt like a wall of tissue-paper, burst through and fallen.

7

"BOW LILIES, and acknowledge your queen."

Without the small circle where I lay, helpless, at one side of the priestess, the lilies swayed, then inclined their heads forward until they had nearly touched the ground.

Where was Jeanne? I had seen her, but now I could see only Caroline and the prostrate flowers. She placed an object on the ground and from it rose a pillar of light. Bright it was, casting no shadow, and giving off no heat. Yet, the darkness beyond the clusters remained as before.

I tried to close my eyes, to move. What had happened after I entered the circle? Where were Harlev and Brent?

"Thirst lilies, thirst and be ready to receive beneficence."

A sigh seemed to ripple through the ranks of the flowers, a sigh that swelled into a whisper. Now the lilies straightened up, still sighing, and

swayed back and forth in unison.

In the distance, a figure was approaching. It came up to the edge of the circle, came — and passed through. Julian!

But — he was walking woodenly, entrancedly. Puppet-like he approached the pillar of radiance and knelt before the priestess.

"You saw fit to disregard my excellent advice," murmured Caroline with deadly sweetness.

The kneeling figure raised its arms, then prostrated itself before her. "For you, there can be no mercy. Go, now, unto the lilies."

She raised her arm in a gesture of command. "Lilies, receive your sacrifice."

And he who had been Julian Brent arose, striding woodenly, and went out of the circle, into the waiting flower-ranks. Slowly the flowers reached out, touched him with their cups. As one in a dream, he strode, weaving in and out of the clusters, making a gauntlet of the lilies. From all sides the flowers reached for him, twining and writhing like snakes.

He passed out of my sight, and there was only the pillar of hellish light and the flowers directly before me. Vainly I strove to burst the paralysis that encased me, but it was as if I, too, had been turned to stone.

Now Julian had completed the circle. He appeared dwarfed, shriveled. He came back into the circle, and I could see that his clothes now hung loosely upon him, and that his flesh was withered, and seamed with great wrinkles. Julian was now an aged man. He tottered up to the priestess. She flung out a hand in dismissal. For a moment he stood there, unmoving, then entered the pillar of radiance and was gone.

AGAIN CAME the voice of the priestess. "Rejoice, lilies, for your feast has but begun." She beckoned to someone outside my line of vision. A figure arose

...
Somewhere in my brain, a voice was calling. It was vague, indistinct, fading just when I thought I could hear it. Then,

abruptly, it became crystal clear.

"Nick! Grasp Jeanne's hand, quickly!"

Jeanne? But who, what was Jeanne? Could it be this other, half-distinct figure that had just arisen, was even now beginning to make its way to the waiting flowers?

"Now! Grasp her hand as she passes you!"

Gritting my teeth, I concentrated on moving, concentrated as never had I done so before. And the paralysis was gone. I saw up, reached out as the woman strode by and caught hold of her hand, clung.

Then I remembered. Jeanne! Holding her hand, I rose to my feet, trembling, and faced the priestess. Her face had gone white. Then her eyes flared . . .

And the world reeled before me. Where was I? Something was dragging at me, pulling me down, down. What could it be? Something . . . *clasp*ing my hand. That was it. I clung to something and it was drawing me down into the depths; I must let go, release it . . .

Why was I holding on to a serpent? It lay motionless, but the reptilian feeling of it revolted me. Fling it away, rid my hands of this foulness . . .

"Nick! Hold on; don't let go of her hand!"

And again I was facing Caroline, out on the accursed hills standing hand-in-hand with Jeanne. Her face was a mask of fury and terror mingled. In strident tones, she cried out words and made motions with her hands. But nothing happened.

And now I knew what must we do. Drawing Jeanne close to me, we stepped into the great pillar of light. There was the sound of bursting glass, and it was gone.

And Caroline screamed.

Vainly she tried to beat off an invisible something that was pushing her backward, backward into the ranks of the waiting flowers. Futilely she called upon names and touched her rings.

Then the priestess was gone. There was only a frightened girl.

"Nickie, Nickie," she sobbed. "Nickie, Aital!"

But she was already among the lilies. They reached out for her, eagerly, and — and what was it I saw?

The lilies were rising out of the ground, rising and marching on their tentacle-like roots.

The entire mass of flowers swarmed over the woman who had been their queen, enveloped her, hid her from sight when she fell. And, before her body was hidden from sight, I could see the — shriveling!

And the accursed hills burst into flame and melted away, the flowers faded from sight, and there was around us the topography we had known in years before — the little basin set between the distant mountains, and the river, gleaming in the light of the now-dimmed moon.

"Harley's voice came to us through the darkness. "It's done," he said simply.

8

WE SAT ON the porch of The Willows, looking out over the lake. I saw wild geese flying, and there was a lump in my throat. Jeanne's hand crept into mine.

"Harley," she asked, "what were those lilies, really?"

"It is possible to transfer the consciousness of a person into something else. The lilies held

the — let us say, souls — of the people of Greylock. Human consciousness in a flower obviously cannot express more than a fraction of human consciousness in the form designed for it. They did not suffer. Think of them as the souls in the Elysian Fields of Greek legend, who remembered nothing of the past, but had just a trace of awareness.”

“Then they are free now?”

“They are free. They will continue according to each one’s state of development; life is continuous.”

“Then Caroline . . .” I asked.

Harley turned to me. “She has a long, hard road to travel before her account is clear. It will do no harm to pray for her; but remember, no prayers can cancel the debt. That is the law.”

“Might they . . . help?”

“Any form of genuine sympathy and love helps.”

It seemed then that a faint voice cried, *Non ti scordar de mi. I* whispered, “*Addio*”.

In time, the blanks in my memory filled in. . . . There is no going back. I can type using all my fingers now, but the chance of becoming a concert pianist has gone.

When the war came, Jeanne and I went to England. There was a place for a writer, and her talent was needed. Harley stayed at The Willows, and

when we came back, a new vil-
lage had arisen — New Grey-
lock. The Goodenow name
still has currency in the area,
although when Harley dies the
witch branch of the family will
be gone — at least in this coun-
try. It seems strange to me now
to think of the Goodenow
witches becoming extinct, un-
less our son, Julian . . . well,
that is his decision.

Jeanne and I are not book-
burners. We didn't destroy the
library that the Goodenows ac-
cumulated. The last time Har-
ley was with us, he arranged
for the books to be placed
where they would be available
to those who were ready for
them.

And . . . the Lord of the
Manor.

It is hard to understand, but
I realized at last that I had no
right to try to destroy access
to this being. But I need not
do anything to make it easy
for anyone to find It.

Harley also said that it would
do no harm now to publish a
carefully edited version of the
account I wrote shortly after-
wards — for therapy, I guess.
Anyway, I felt better after I
had written it out.

The night is cold, and I can
see moonlight on the ice. I just
went out onto the porch; it is
very clear, and the cabin stands
out with its crest of snow.

Caroline . . . *Traviata* . . .
pacel